

Cryptosporidiosis

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Cryptosporidiosis in humans is caused by infection with a protozoan parasite classified as *Cryptosporidium parvum*. Oocysts, the infective stage of this parasite, after an incubation period of 1 to 12 days (median 7 days) cause an illness that presents as watery diarrhea with abdominal cramps, possibly accompanied by fever, nausea, vomiting, and myalgias.¹ In AIDS patients the illness varies from asymptomatic carriage to severe watery diarrhea with weight loss, electrolyte imbalance and dehydration. Duration of illness can range from days to months, but usually resolves within 2 weeks in immunocompetent patients, although shedding of oocysts can occur up to 2 weeks after the patient is clinically well.

Oocysts may be transmitted via contaminated food or water or by direct contact with infected livestock or pets and from person to person by the fecal-oral route.² *Cryptosporidium* oocysts are present in most surface waters (i.e. rivers, streams, and lakes) throughout the United States, show resistance to chlorine and are difficult to remove by filters. Epidemiological studies have shown that municipal water supplies, camping, swimming, association with kittens, puppies and young livestock or direct contact with feces while caring for an infected person prior were the most frequently identified risk factors.

Cryptosporidiosis is a newly emerging infectious disease and has only been reportable in Florida since 1992 when 27 cases were reported. Case reporting increased somewhat in 1993 (54) and 1994 (86), but more than tripled in 1995 (1.9 per 100,000) when 275 confirmed cases were documented.³ Incidence is highest in children less than five years old and males 30 to 39 with rates in non-whites of both sexes more than twice as high as whites. Most cases occur sporadically with the incidence highest in Dade, Broward and Palm Beach Counties. However, a waterborne outbreak at a school day care facility in Alachua County involving 77 individuals, mostly children was investigated in 1995.⁴

The CDC has recently produced a handbook entitled *Cryptosporidium and Water* that will help local health departments and water utilities deal with *Cryptosporidium* in community water supplies.⁵ Copies can be obtained by writing to: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Infectious Diseases, Division of Parasitic Diseases, Mailstop F-22, 4770 Buford Highway N.E., Atlanta, GA 30341-3724.

References

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